

I claim:

1. An ankle brace of the type adapted to extend along the lateral and medial aspects of an injured ankle and lower leg for supporting the ankle during healing, and comprising:

(a) a medial side support for extending along the medial aspect of the ankle and lower leg, the medial side support including an elongate, rigid support member having a lower end of sufficiently narrow width and thinness to fit inside a shoe being worn by a wearer of the brace, said medial side support including a soft, flexible perimeter edge portion mechanically adhered to and extending outwardly in overlapping, non-interfiting relation to the rigid support member for protecting the medial aspect of the leg and ankle from irritation resulting from contact with edges of the rigid support member;

(b) a lateral side support for extending along the lateral aspect of the ankle and lower leg, the lateral side support including an elongate, rigid support member having a lower end of sufficiently narrow width and thinness to fit inside the shoe, said lateral side support including a soft, flexible perimeter edge portion mechanically adhered to and extending outwardly in overlapping, non-interfiting relation to the rigid support member for protecting the lateral aspect of the leg and ankle from irritation resulting from contact with edges of the rigid support member; and

(c) connector means for connecting the medial side support and lateral side support together at their respective lower ends and extending under the foot of the wearer of the brace.

2. An ankle brace according to claim 1, wherein the medial side support and the lateral side support each include a padding material positioned adjacent an inner face of the respective rigid support members.
3. An ankle brace according to claim 1, wherein the perimeter edge portions are adhered to the respective rigid support members by an adhesive.
4. An ankle brace according to claim 1, wherein the padding material overlaps and extends outwardly beyond side edges of the respective rigid support members, and the perimeter edge portions overlap and extend outwardly beyond side edges of both the rigid support members and the padding material.
5. An ankle brace according to claim 1, 2, 3 or 4, wherein the medial support member and the lateral support member each are formed of a preformed plastic material.
6. An ankle brace according to claim 4, wherein:
 - (a) said padding material overlaps and extends outwardly beyond the side edges of the rigid support members;
 - (b) said perimeter edge portions overlap and extend outwardly beyond the side edges of both the rigid support member and the padding material; and
 - (c) said perimeter edge portions are adhered to both the rigid side support and to overlapped portions of the padding material.

7. An ankle brace according to claim 5, wherein said padding material comprises a three-dimensional fabric.
8. An ankle brace according to claim 5, wherein said padding material comprises two overlaid layers of a three-dimensional fabric.
9. An ankle brace according to claim 5, wherein said padding material comprises at least one layer of a three-dimensional fabric of the type characterized by being highly air-permeable and free of latex.
10. An ankle brace according to claim 1, and including at least one strap for retaining the medial side support and lateral side support in a closely-conforming condition against the lower leg and ankle.
11. An ankle brace according to claim 9, wherein said padding material is between 6 and 12 mm thick.
12. An ankle brace according to claim 9, wherein said padding material is 9 mm thick.

13. An ankle brace according to claim 2, wherein the padding material comprises:

- (a) a single layer overlying the inner face of the rigid support members; and
- (b) a second layer overlying an area of the rigid support member adapted to reside next to and support the ankle.

14. An ankle brace according to claim 13, wherein the padding material comprises a three-dimensional fabric.

15. An ankle brace according to claim 1, wherein said connector means comprises:

- (a) a medial strap carried by the medial support member;
- (b) a lateral strap carried by the lateral support member; and
- (c) complementary attachment members carried by the medial strap and lateral strap, respectively, for permitting the medial strap and the lateral strap to be releasably connected.

16. An ankle brace according to claim 15, wherein said complementary attachment members comprise hook and loop fastener assemblies.

17. An ankle brace according to claim 1, wherein said connector means comprises:

(a) a strap carried by one of the medial support member or lateral support member having an attachment member carried on one end thereof;

(b) a complementary attachment member carried on an outer surface of the other of the medial support member and the lateral support member for cooperating with the attachment member for connecting the medial side support and the lateral side support.

18. An ankle brace according to claim 1, wherein said perimeter edge portion is selected from the group consisting of vinyl, rubber or synthetic rubber.

19. An ankle brace according to claim 1, wherein said perimeter edge portion is tapered towards the outer edge thereof to increase flexibility.

20. An ankle brace of the type adapted to extend along the lateral and medial aspects of an injured ankle and lower leg for supporting the ankle during healing, and comprising:

(a) a medial side support for extending along the medial aspect of the ankle and lower leg, the medial side support including an elongate, rigid support member having a lower end of sufficiently narrow width and thinness to fit inside a shoe being worn by a wearer of the brace, said medial side support including a soft, flexible perimeter edge portion mechanically adhered to and extending outwardly in overlapping, non-interfiting relation to the medial rigid support member for protecting the medial aspect of the leg and ankle from irritation resulting from contact with edges of the rigid support member;

(b) a lateral side support for extending along the lateral aspect of the ankle and lower leg, the lateral side support including an elongate, rigid support member having a lower end of sufficiently narrow width and thinness to fit inside the shoe, said lateral side support including a soft, flexible perimeter edge portion mechanically adhered to and extending outwardly in overlapping, non-interfiting relation to the lateral support member for protecting the lateral aspect of the leg and ankle from irritation resulting from contact with edges of the rigid support member;

(c) connector means for connecting the medial side support and lateral side support together at their respective lower ends and extending under the foot of the wearer of the brace, the connector means comprising:

- (i) a medial strap carried by the medial support member;
- (ii) a lateral strap carried by the lateral support member; and
- (iii) complementary attachment members carried by the medial strap and lateral strap, respectively, for permitting the medial strap and the lateral strap to be connected, said complementary attachment members comprising respective hook and loop fastener assemblies; and

(d) at least one layer of fabric padding positioned on an inner surface of the medial and lateral rigid support members for providing protection to the leg and ankle.

21. An ankle brace according to claim 20, wherein the perimeter edge portions are adhered to an outer facing surface of the respective medial and lateral side supports.

22. An ankle brace according to claim 21, wherein:

- (a) the fabric padding extends outwardly beyond the perimeter of the rigid support member;
- (b) the perimeter edge portion inwardly overlaps the edges of the rigid support member; and
- (c) the perimeter edge portion outwardly overlaps the fabric padding to define an outermost perimetrical extent of the medial and lateral side supports of the ankle brace.